

MODERN FREETHINKER

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Religious Susceptibilities and Secular Convictions

—Varkey Shantistan

Recently, the Christian priests and bishops of Kerala organised Public rallies against a drama entitled "Sixth Holy Wound of Christ" written by Mr. Antony, a rationalist. Subsequently the performance of the drama has been banned in different towns of the state. Varkey Shantistan's views on religious susceptibilities, has the above incident as a background.

—Editor

It is maintained that we should respect one another's beliefs. How this is posseth human understanding? All sincere Christians believe that all other beliefs are unchristian and, therefore, untrue. And how can untrue or false beliefs be respected? Mutual respect for one another's beliefs is bluff. It is only meant to hoodwink common people. It only proves that the belief of religionists is bunkum.

Nevertheless, there is something common to all religious beliefs, namely their illogicality. They are by their very nature blind beliefs, unsupported by evidence or scientific proof. It is held that these beliefs are beyond scientific investigation. If the light of science or reason is turned on them they will appear void of substance.

Let us take for example the common Christian belief, the two main items of which are belief in a personal God and belief in Christ, his son as the saviour of mankind. And what is the nature of this God? He is a prayerable, praiseworthy, thanks deserving God. He is above law and can dispense favour and disfavour according to the prayers offered to him. But these prayers may be contradictory to one another and so may neutralise or cancel out one another. His praises are to be sung, for what purpose one does not know. So also should he be thanked unceasingly. In man's dealings with one another all

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Modern Freethinker

JOURNAL OF THE INDIAN RATIONALIST ASSOCIATION

Editor : SANAL EDAMARUKU

The 13th National Conference of the Indian Rationalist Association held at Vijayawada in 1985 pointed out the necessity to have a Rationalist Manifesto. Following that, the National Council of the Association held at New Delhi in September, 1985 authorised Sanal Edamaruku to draft the manifesto. The manifesto thus drafted and presented during the joint meeting of the National Council and Executive Committee of IRA held at Vijayawada in December 1986, is reproduced here. We invite all rationalist units all over the country to discuss on the draft manifesto and suggest their proposals, if any, before the end of March 1987.

—Editor

A Rationalist Manifesto (Draft)

Rationalism as a way of thought, and rationalists as groups of people who are dedicated to establish a new awakening in the spheres of social, cultural, and political life of humanity have been doing significant work for nearly a century. Wherever freethought is chained, unconventional thinking is crime, social oppression is way of life, and people are deeply superstitious, rationalism tend a vociferous fight—and the tools of this fight are education, wisdom, knowledge, scientific temper, and humanism. Whatever forces come against human progress—religion, taboos, castes, creeds, racial superiority, traditionalism et al—have to be exposed to establish a scientific, humanistic, democratic new world.

Rationalists who are acclaimed by different nomenclatures—Humanists, Atheists, Secularists, Agnostics, Materialists—do

unite together in their common struggle for the establishment of a new social, ethical and political order. For rationalists, there being no ultimate goal, progress, development, and growth are matters of degree. For a rationalist, everything is reconsiderable, anything is questionable, and the measure foots are individual and social welfare, and the guideline is human love.

Rationalism as a way of thought has been expressed by ancient philosophers in many societies, in Greece, in India, in China. Several ancient scriptures show traces and evidences of early rationalist thinking. Philosophically rationalism has been a view that reason alone can provide us with knowledge. Philosophical rationalism was opposed by empiricism which insisted observation and experience of facts as basis of knowledge. Modern rationalism has taken roots from the ancient materialist thought, philosophical rationalism and empiricism. However, the modern rationalist is not merely anyone of the above. The term rationalism means farther and wider things.

There have been efforts to define rationalism. One definition that received wider acceptance reads as follows: "Rationalism is the mental attitude which unreservedly accepts the supremacy of reason and aims at establishing a system of philosophy and ethics, verifiable by experience and independent of all arbitrary assumptions of authority". This definition which was adopted by the Rationalist Press Association in London in the year 1899 vaguely, but precisely, explains rationalism. But it certainly needs further elaboration to understand fully what modern rationalism means.

Rationalism, as a mental attitude, is an ongoing pursuit in search of truth. It never accepts a set of beliefs which cannot be questioned or verified. Every concept, every philosophy, in that case any hitherto knowledge, if questioned in the process of understanding it, have to be verified without ties or bonds. A rationalist does not believe that every question is answered about universe and that the universe was created and controlled by some supernatural force. Freethought exercised reasonably may correct, rectify or even deny any traditional understanding

or knowledge. A rationalist is open-minded to accept the right against wrong, better against bad, anytime and anywhere without bothering the mainstream of what others think without exercising their freethought. Religious teachings, dogmatic philosophies, and closed social systems essentially come in the way of freethought.

Rationalism as a way of social understanding, refuses to accept any ethical code or value system based on "revealed wisdom" or "discovered fact". Human values are not eternal, they essentially change according to social necessities. Ethical or moral systems have to be based on scientific knowledge and social experience.

Rationalism as an attitude of life is based on science and scientific method. There definitely is a fundamental difference between religious and rationalist attitude towards life and universe. Religions expressed ancient understandings about life and universe. "Holy scriptures" that contain these ancient beliefs became unquestionable dogmas and denied scientific knowledge. Every new discovery of science conflicted the ancient beliefs sanctioned by scriptures and religions. Religions primarily found science as an enemy and tried with claws and teeth to block its progress. Scientists were persecuted. Knowledge was suppressed. Over the years, fighting the barricades put by religions, science emerged triumphing, and started witnessing a period of new tribes of old religions trying frantically to obtain "scientific sanction" to old renunciated beliefs by twisting and interpreting facts. This evidently is an effort of religious establishments to exist in a changing world to continue their exploitation and to check human progress.

Rationalism as a guideline to social change does not accept any particular political or social philosophy as final answer to all problems. No dogmatic concept, no channelised historical growth, no ultimate philosophies are there for rationalists. Human welfare shall be the consideration, principled pragmatism shall be the methodology, and liberty the torch.

Promotion of scientific temper

The society is deeply superstitious and systematic efforts are being made by the local witch to the high priest to chain the human mind down in blind beliefs. Promotion of scientific temper will help people to think themselves, stand up straight on their own feet, and to refuse local inorganised and highly organised ways of religious propaganda. Rationalists understand that the religious efforts to force people to believe in god or gods, miracles, astrology, palmistry, demonology, reincarnation, extra sensory perceptions, telepathy, prayers, pujas, mantras and pilgrimages etc is a cunning way to keep them away from material realities and to ward them off from social realities. Promotion of scientific temper makes people aware of scientific facts and enables them to understand things with a scientific sense. In agriculture, in industry, in trade, in every aspect of day-to-day life scientific temper asks one to refuse traditions and adopt new ideas.

Science for human welfare

The function of science is to acquire verifiable factual knowledge. The knowledge accumulated has to be used for human welfare. Efforts to use scientific knowledge for destructive purposes have to be stopped. Peaceful, free, prosperous life is everyone's ambition and science should be in supportive of it. Arsenals and weapons of all kind that are made to use against other human beings are to be discouraged.

No war, but peace

Rationalists are against all forms of war, against annihilation of human beings, against using conventional or technologically advanced weapons against the life or health of other individuals. Life is only once, and no one has the right to put an end to others' life. Peaceful individual and social life is an essential requirement. Rationalists aim at a society where wars are absent. Peaceful co-existence has to be accepted and respected.

Freedom from religion and freedom of religion

Human beings are essentially free. Every one has the right to be free from any religion imposed upon one by way of family or

social relations. Freedom from religion is a fundamental right of every individual. Though rationalists consider religion as a total obstruction to social progress, they respect others' freedom to believe in and practise any religion. Nobody has right to impose a religion or belief on others.

Campaign against dogmas and blind beliefs

Rationalists believe in persuasion and not in confrontation. Systematic education and campaigning against dogmatic scriptures that blind people have to be undertaken to help people think themselves. Blind beliefs are to be exposed.

Liberation from superstitions

People who have fallen prey to superstitious beliefs have to be liberated. Astrology, sorcery, human or animal sacrifices, witchcraft, praying on one's behalf etc. are to be discouraged and effectively campaigned against.

Secular education

Scientific modern education has to be based on the concept of the total development of the student. Its content should be rooted in scientific knowledge and social awareness. Religious education and prayers at schools have to be banned totally. Educational institutions and religions have to be separated clearly.

Separation of State and religion

State has to be separated totally and fully from religion. Promotion of any religion at social expense is anti-democratic and anti-secular. Secularism is never the promotion of any particular or all religions. Promotion of any religion through state-owned media, and the participation of any government functionary in a religious function in his official capacity, and government patronage to any particular or all religions are undoubtedly anti-secular. Rationalists are for the establishment of a genuine secular state.

Human rights and civil liberties

Fundamental human rights and civil liberties in any society have to be respected. In no case the human rights and civil

liberties of any individual be jeopardised. Progress without human rights is meaningless.

An egalitarian society

The rationalists visualise a society based on economic, social and political justice, where everybody gets quality livelihood, basic requirements, freedom of thought and expression. Pursuit for happiness is everyone's right in a just society. Right to work and right to live decently and fearlessly are fundamental rights.

No race or caste or color superior

The new society visualised by rationalists shall not accept the superiority of any caste or race or creed or color. As everyone is born free to every others, efforts to establish the superiority of any race or caste or creed or color over others have to be denounced and fought out.

Promotion of inter marriages

To bring an end to caste, race and color discrimination and to bring out international cosmopolitanism, inter religious, inter linguistic, inter national, and inter race marriages are to be promoted.

Equality of sexes

Throughout historical period, women had been oppressed overtly and covertly and religions played an important role in chaining them down. The rationalists do believe that the sexes are equal in all respects. Wherever and whenever equality of sexes are denied, rationalists have the responsibility to end it.

Uniform criminal and civil laws

The people of any nation having discriminatory criminal or civil laws are deprived against. Laws should be based on human rights and civil liberties and all sections of a nation shall be guided by one and the same criminal and civil laws.

Individual's privacy to be respected

The state, being an artificial body created by the people for their welfare, has no right to interfere in the private life of any

individual so long as it does not affect the welfare of others. Individual's freedom to remain private has to be accepted by the state. Individual's privacy has to be respected.

Birth control a right

Wherever necessary population control has to be promoted, as the increase in population vis-a-vis the available resources for good living are not balanced in most parts of the world. Unborn womb is no child, and scientific birth control has to be accepted as the right of any woman or man, no matter whether one is married or not.

No class superiority

Rationalists do not believe in the superiority of any particular profession or trade or job. As long as it is useful to the society or the individuals in a society, every job has to be accepted with equal status with other jobs. There is no master class, suppression of one class over the other class or classes cannot be permitted.

Taboos related to food

There shall be no social pressures over the food habits of individuals. There shall be freedom to eat the best food suitable to one's taste, health and financial capacity. Social taboos against different food materials prevalent in different societies have to be discouraged and a scientific, healthy attitude towards food has to be developed.

Basic rights

Rationalists recognise the following as the basic rights of all individuals :

1. Food, 2. Clothing, 3. Shelter, 4. Sleep, 5. Sex, 6. Work, 7. Rest, 8. Recreation, 9. Freedom, 10. Knowledge, 11. Social relations, 12. Positive health.

No infallible teachers

There is no infallible teacher or saviour or guru who can save the whole world or who cannot be questioned. Nobody has unmistakable wisdom. For a rationalist, everything is verifiable,

questionable, and correctable. And a rationalist corrects any preconceived idea if found incorrect.

Abstention from religion

Rationalists are committed for the establishment of a non-religious, secular social structure. Belief in any particular religion shall be one's personal freedom, but religions shall not be permitted to interfere with the social, educational, cultural, political life. Rationalists understand that religion is an obstruction to progress. While respecting the right of a religionist to believe and practise his/her religion, a rationalist abstains personally from all religious functions.

Harmony between principles and action

A rationalist shall practise what he preaches. It is no sincere approach to act against what one propagates for short term gains. There shall be perfect harmony between the ideals that a rationalist highlights and the life style he maintains.

Scientific morality and humanism to guide

While refusing to accept any sort of "revealed" or "intuitioned" morality, rationalists do live according to social and individual morality based on scientific knowledge and social well being. Humanism shall be the major guideline for rationalist morality.

A bright new world

A new world order, based on fraternity, liberty and equality; where the corner stone is reasoning, not belief; where individuals stand firm on their own feet, not leaning towards any unknown being or force; where the collective work of people shall be for the individuals here in this world and now; shall be attained. The rationalists are committed to that cause. We invite all like-minded individuals to join this struggle with a strong determination to face any odds, to attain a new bright world.

Secularism under Indian Constitution-3

The relevant articles in the Constitution

—Justice R.A. Jahagirdar

The Indian Constitution enacted in the year 1950 did not, before the 42nd Amendment, contain the word 'secular' or 'God' in it. The word "God" is to be found only in the forms of oath to be taken by various persons mentioned in the Third Schedule of the Constitution. Prima facie, therefore, one is tempted to conclude that a document which contains no reference to God must necessarily be secular. However one must not forget that the total absence of the word "secular" may lead one to the conclusion that the Constitution is not secular. The character of the Constitution cannot be decided by a mere reference to the presence or absence of a word or two. If we examine broadly all the features of the Indian Constitution it is possible to say that India is a secular State in the sense that—

- (i) no particular religion is prescribed as the State-religion;
- (ii) no preferential treatment is envisaged to any religion or to people professing any particular religion; and
- (iii) the right to worship is given to persons professing all religions

Active or direct promotion or propagation of any religion by the State is not provided for in the Indian Constitution. In this sense it is secular. Moreover, Article 14 of the Constitution enjoins upon the State not to deny any person equality before the law or equal protection of rights within the territory of India. This necessarily means that persons professing different religions will be treated equally by the State. Article 15 of the Constitution prohibits discrimination against any citizen on the ground of religion, among

others. Similarly, equality of opportunity is assured to persons professing different religions under Article 16 of the Constitution. Article 29 prohibits an educational institution maintained or aided by the State from denying admission to anyone on the ground of religion. Looking to the ground one is naturally tempted to subscribe to the view, as many well-intentioned and well-informed people have subscribed, that the Constitution of India is a secular Constitution and that it establishes a secular State.

THERE ARE however some other features of the Constitution which deter a person like me from agreeing that the Constitution of India is a secular Constitution or that it establishes a secular State. It is true that Article 25 of the Constitution which says that persons are entitled to freedom of conscience and right to freely profess, practise and propagate religion also mentions that this right is subject to public order, morality and health and all the other provisions or part III of the Constitution. So the right given to profess, practise and propagate religion is to be exercised within the four corners of the restrictions mentioned in Article 25 of the Constitution. Moreover, clause (2) of the said Article mentions that the freedom of religion given by the said Article shall not affect the operation of any law or prevent the State from making any law regulating or restricting any economic, financial, political or other secular activity which may be associated with religious practice. Thus there is a second inroad into the religious freedom guaranteed under Article 25 of the Constitution. This feature of the Constitution, no doubt, suggests to some extent that the State in India is a secular State. Similarly Article 26 mentions that subject to public order, morality and health every religious denomination or any section thereof shall have the right to establish and maintain institutions for religious and charitable purposes to manage its own affairs in matters of religion. HOWEVER WHEN WE GO to the next two articles, namely Articles 27 and 28 of the Constitution, we find provisions which detract from the secular character of the Constitution. Article 27 mentions that no person shall be compelled to pay

any taxes the proceeds of which are specifically appropriated in payment of expenses for the promotion or maintenance of any particular religion or religious denomination. This article therefore is only a ban against the State from collecting taxes part or whole of which could be utilised for the promotion or maintenance of any particular religion. In other words, it does not prevent the State from utilising its funds for the promotion of religion or a religious approach. Read simply, the article only prevents the State from collecting any money from persons for the purpose of promoting or maintaining any particular religion. If there is no connection between the collection of taxes and the promotion or maintenance of any particular religious denomination one does not know whether the ban contained in Article 27 of the Constitution can come into play. In other words, the funds which form part of the general revenue of the State can be utilised for promoting all religions. In any case, State funds can be utilised for promoting religious teaching. In so far as there is no total prohibition against the use of the funds of the State for the promotion of religion the Constitution can not be said to be secular. Indeed, if Article 27 by necessary implication permits the use of the funds of the State for religions generally, there is necessarily a denial of the character of secularism of the Indian Constitution.

"I have read of Atheists facing all troubles quite bodily, so am I trying to stand like a man with an erect head to the last; even on the gallows."

—Bhagat Singh

Clothing

—Joseph Edamaruku

Clothing is the next essential thing for man after food. As man is a social being he cannot live without hiding his nakedness. If a man or woman who has come of age, steps out into the open, stripped off clothes, he or she will be arrested and locked up. At the same time the Jain sanyasins of North India walk about unclad: society or law simply turns a blind eye to it. Some groups of people living in the tropical zones of South India, Africa and America, wear only loose clothes. In those regions and groups women were not used to cover their breasts. Some tribals living in forests of the Andamans and South India live nude. On the other hand the women of Saudi Arabia and some other Muslim countries are meticulously clad in purda, covering even their faces. This is a religious tenet of Islam. Religious customs have imposed bans and restrictions on dress in many places. The majority of the people of Kerala wear dhotis around their waist and fix the right end just above the right hip. But the Muslims there fix the right end just above the left hip. The Muslims adopted this manner of dressing to have or to show a distinct bearing. Likewise there are differences in the modes of dressing of Hindu, Christian and Muslim women, as if to declare their religions at the first glance. But there are perceptible changes in this generation. We know sanyasi, priest, nurse and police man from their dress. They wear dress to signify their professions. This is the idea behind the uniforms of school children too.

Some historians say that man began to wear clothes to protect the body from the rigours of climate. People who live in cold climates cannot do without warm clothing. The Eskimos who inhabit the icy stretches of Alaska wear hard foot wear and woollen pants, and coats and caps. The people in the tropics cannot endure such a dress for five minutes.

Maybe the historians came to the above inference on the strength of the above. But Charles Darwin, the exponent of

the theory of evolution says that man first began to wear clothes as ornaments. In the thirties of the 19th century Darwin and his colleagues visited Tierra Del Hugo. It is an island lying to the south of South America near the South Pole. It is an excessively cold place. Even so, the people there wore only small pieces of leather, one piece on their necks and another piece around their lions. Even when snow was falling it was their total dress. Although some of them were given dresses to cover the entire body, they only tied them on their necks as ornaments. Some other anthropologists also later found out that other peoples who were living in other regions of extreme cold were wearing clothes as mere ornaments and not to protect themselves from climatic rigours. This does not mean that people at large started to wear clothes owing to this reason. Men came to know the protective aspect of clothes when they began to wear leather either as ornaments or to show their bravery. When a hunter killed a beast and dried its leather and wore it, he might have thought only to let others know that he was brave enough even worst the beast in encounter. Also he might have become delighted when he unwittingly grasped the benefit of the use of leather in warding off the cold. It is said that man stumbled on the discovery about a hundred thousand years ago. Leather has been replaced by cotton fabrics, silk, woollen wear and fibre. Today after food, clothe is the most essential thing to man. It has many uses such as covering nakedness, protection from climate, capturing attention, augmenting good looks, et. al. You cannot dismiss all these as wrong; only that there should not be any meaningless rigid approach to such matters.

As in many other spheres, habit has established some customs in regard to dress. Once a man from South India came to Delhi. It is very cold there in the months of December and January. The atmosphere temperature will sometimes fall upto 2° centigrade. The South Indian friend who habitually donned only a shirt and dhoti was told to wear woollen pants and coat, but he did not. His reply was that he was not used to it and that he only wanted to go away from here. When people from cold countries go to tropical regions they experiment

just contrary. The clothes that they use there won't suit them and force of habit will stick on.

This problem crops up not only in relation to climate. During the British Raj, pants, coat and tie were the marks of status and cultured life in India. Especially the officers aped the rulers in the matter of clothing. Even now this habit persists. In May, June and July the temperature in Delhi goes rising upto 45 centigrade. We can see the offices with pants, coat and tie on. Only they unconsciously follow the British custom. Otherwise they would lose status, they think.

Most of the Indian women wear saris. No doubt it looks beautiful to wear saris. "Until the women of India give up saris, they cannot have any progress. This kind of dress is unfit for running, jumping, swimming and working. This suits only the women who have no need to work." This was what a person who came to conduct research about the village system of India said. This seems to be correct. Wearing the sari, no work can be done with ease. But even the enlightened women of India are averse to replace the sari with some other clothes. It may be noted that the Punjabi women who wear Pyjama and Kurta do not have to endure as much unease. That the girls of the new generation have taken to pants and shirt may be considered as a qualitative change.

Man has a fundamental right to wear any kind of clothes suited for the purposes of good looks, and profession. But there are many restrictions and restraints on the modes of dressing. Muslim youngsters in the villages of South India are compelled to wear dhotis leftwise. The following are the directions in the Koran about women's dress.

"Tell the true female believers to shut their eyes and to be careful to conceal their private parts. They should not expose themselves except as for their adornments. Let their head dresses be pulled down over their breasts. Let them not display their graces except to their husband to the sons of their brothers, to the sons of their sisters, their women, to those who have owned

their right hands, dependents who are devoid of libido, and to children who have not known the private parts of human body."

(Thafserul Koran 24 : 31)

On another occasion Muhammad said categorically: "Women must remain sequestered". It is due to such commands that women were constrained to wear purdas. The women of Muslim countries are no better than slaves, in this regard. In India also, purda women can be seen in large numbers. There was the purda system among the Jews also as can be seen from the Old Testament (Genesis 24 : 65 : 38 : 14).

While some religions enjoin the purda system, some other religions and customs were against women covering their breasts.

Until the first leg of the 20th century among the Nairs, Nadars, Ezhavas and Namboothiris of Kerala, women were not used to cover their breasts. In the fifties of the 19th century, a lot of Nadars in South India embraced Christianity. Imitating the Christians their women began to cover their breasts. This angered the upper caste Hindus of that region. They went to the length of stripping those women and slashing their breasts. Riots ensued which are called the Nadar riots. At last the right to cover breasts was approved and those who opposed it with violence and were proceeded against. Though the right was legally conceded, the women of Nairs, Nadars and Ezhavas continued to think that to cover breasts was wrong. It was the social reformatory movements which took shape under the leadership Narayana Guru that induced the Ezhava women to cover their breasts. His followers were used to distribute blouses among the women. This happened sixty years ago. History shows that some communities were not legally entitled to wear certain kinds of clothes. Anyhow, such prohibitions are gone today. But some hard and fast rules of religion and customs do survive. Those rules also should be done away with. Clothes must be suitable for the climatic conditions, beautiful and must conform to taste. This is the rationalist view of one's dress.

(Contd. next Issue)

these tactics are practised. It is obvious that man has created God in his own image and degraded him to his own level.

The Christian scheme for human salvation is equally strange. Man is born in sin and so, his flesh and blood are steeped in this original sin. Christ was born of virgin Mary through the Holy Spirit, uncontaminated by sexual intercourse with a man. So, Christ's flesh and blood are sinless, because he is free from the original sin. In Holy Communion, the believing Christian consumes the sinless flesh and blood of Christ and thereby becomes sinless and is thus saved. Man's deeds in life are altogether irrelevant in the Christian scheme of salvation. The only deciding factor is the belief in Christ as personal saviour.

All other religions also have similar beliefs which are all beyond the pale of reason.

Non-religionists or secularists have no beliefs but only convictions—moulded in the crucible of reason and science—ideas borne out by common sense and life experience. In place of a personal God they believe in certain basic laws and principles that govern the universe and all life,—laws that are relentless, and inexorable. To them the cosmos is generally in order and automatic, but uncontrolled by any outside agency. The concept of a personal prayerable God, the miracles supposed to have been worked in His name, virgin birth, original sin etc. are all offensive to their common sense and out of tune with their life experience. For them nature is all-inclusive, fully selfsufficient and selfsustaining, leaving no room for anything supernatural or transcendental.

Man is a mixture of both reason and emotion. It is reason that sets the direction and emotion that drives him onward. But direction is more important than speed. Therefore, emotion should be subject to the direction of reason. Emotion out of reason's control may spell disaster.

Both religionists and secularists have reason and emotion. The difference between the two is that while the former are

carried away by emotion uncontrolled by reason, the latter try to keep their emotion under the control of reason.

Respect should be neither onesided nor partial. We should respect both reason and emotion. Respect for emotion should not amount to insult to reason. Moreover, there should be respect for the feelings of both religionists and secularists. But now there is heavy weightage in favour of religionists. It is taken for granted that belief in a personal God and faith in prayer are the natural norms. Then assumption that they are truths requiring no proof is unjust and unreasonable. Which child will kneel down in prayer to God if he is not conditioned or brainwashed in early life? Have the believing elders any right to put out the eyes of reason in children? Why not allow them to grow up in nature's care so that they may draw their own inferences and conclusions according to their inner light and life experiences. Any other stand will be doing gross injustice to children.

We should no longer allow the religionists to get away with their bluff. They should be debunked. Their arbitrary assumptions should be challenged and exploded. Elementary human rights are more fundamental than religious or secular rights. And the first human right is the right to approach life with an open mind. Both believers and nonbelievers should have full freedom of thought and expression within the framework of tolerance based on nonviolence. Let there be clash of ideas but not cracking of heads. Let a hundred flowers bloom in nature's open air and it is not secular if a few wither in the hot house of religious fundamentalism.

NEXT ISSUE

Sanal Edamaruku writes on the ex-communication of Punjab Chief Minister by the Sikh high priests.

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